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Chen joins '300' club in winning Four Continents

U.S. champion lands five quads in free skate to outlast Hanyu, Uno

Posted 2/19/17 by Wei Xiong, special to icenetwork



With a free skate that featured five quads -- four of which he landed cleanly -- Nathan Chen outlasted Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu and captured the Four Continents title Sunday in Gangneung, South Korea. Tallying 204.34 points for his "Polovtsian Dances" routine and 307.46 in total, Chen became the first U.S. man to win the event since 2010 (Adam Rippon) and the first to do it in a non-Olympic year (when the field is traditionally stronger) since Evan Lysacek in 2007. -Getty Images

Nathan Chen, the newly crowned U.S. champion, won the men's title at the 2017 Four Continents Championships with a free skate that featured five quads -- the most ever been landed in an international program. Reigning Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu moved up from third in the short to capture the silver medal, and Japanese champion Shoma Uno landed in third place.

The night was another crazy quad battle. The six skaters in the final flight planned 24 quads in total, an average of four per skater, and successfully landed the majority of them.

Chen was the last to take the ice. Skating to "Polovtsian Dances," the 17-year-old conquered an extremely difficult program layout that featured a quad lutz, a quad flip, a quad salchow, two quad toes (one in combination) and two triple axels. Despite a few rough landings and step-outs, he landed every planned jump without falling or popping. Moreover, all his spins and footwork received Level 4.

At the same time, he improved his program components mark from the Grand Prix Final by four points, which led to a total score of 204.34 -- making him the fourth man to break the 200-point barrier in free skate -- and his combined total of 307.46 made him the third man to surpass the 300-point benchmark.

"This feels great, honestly. This is the first championship event that I've won. I had a good lead coming out of the short program, which really benefited me in the long program," Chen said. "I tried five quads today, and I landed three of the five solidly. The other two were a little shaky, so that's something that I need to improve on for worlds."

In fact, according to the planned program content sheet, Chen's original layout did not include the quad salchow, without which he would not have beaten Hanyu.

"Three weeks ago, we were thinking about doing three quads, because we would come here only to make sure to get a spot for the worlds," Rafael Arutunian, Chen's coach, revealed. "But I know this man -- he is a warrior, and he wants to compete. He will do it if he is able to do."

Hanyu, who skated second to last, delivered a season-best performance of this "Hope and Legacy" program. He opened with a quality quad loop, followed by a solid quad salchow and well-executed spins and footwork, and concluded the first half of the program with a triple flip.

However, he then popped his planned quad salchow-triple toe combo -- the jump that has been his nemesis this season -- into a double salchow-single loop. He smartly made up for that miscue by changing the rest of his planned layout, adding two quad toes (one in combination) and two triple axels (one in combination with a triple toe), and landing them all with quality. The Grand Prix Final champion received 206.67 points for the program, a season's best, and 303.71 in total en route to earning his third Four Continents silver medal.

"My free skate today was a challenge for me," Hanyu said after his performance. "My priority in this competition is to land four quads in the program and to solidly land the triple axel combos. I feel frustrated to make the same mistake on the quad salchow again, but after the short program I spent quite some time practicing it, and I think I already found the entry and position to land it more consistently, so I will further improve it through training.

"What I gained from this competition," Hanyu continued, "is how to recover from the quad salchow mistake and hit the elements in the rest of the program. At Grand Prix Final, after the failed quad salchow,

I couldn't land the following quad toe and triple axel well, but this time I was able to do it. I feel like I have raised the lower limit of my performance."

Uno had a extraordinary start to his "Buenos Aires Hora Cero" program, landing a beautiful quad loop and following that with a stunning quad flip and a solid triple lutz. However, he started to stumble in the second half of the program, falling on both of his triple axels and landing only one combination. Despite the mistakes, the Japanese champion accrued 187.77 points in free skate, giving him a combined total of 288.05.

"The first half was great," Uno said. "I felt happy to land the quad loop, which I still cannot land consistently in training. As for the second half, the mistakes on the triple axels were not because of exhaustion but because I lost my focus. I am very consistent with my triple axel, so when I entered the jump, I thought, 'I can land it, no problem,' but the moment I took off, I realized something went wrong."

A year from now, the same venue where Four Continents was held, the Gangneung Ice Arena, will host the Olympics. When asked how many, and how many different types, of quads he could imagine himself doing at that competition, Chen responded, "That's a little bit of a difficult question to answer. It's really relative. The amount of quads I put into a program in a particular season is relative to how my body is adapting to training, how my body's adapting to competition and what the other skaters are doing."

His coach's answer sounded more intriguing, though.

"Don't you think we have something more?" Arutunian asked back. "We have something more. We are working on it. You will see it."



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